

Message Text

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PAGE 01 KUALA 04619 250041Z

ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4517

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 4619

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, MY

SUBJECT: DAP POLITICIAN REFUSED ENTRY INTO SABAH

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 3190 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. THE SABAH STATE GOVERNMENT BANNED THE ENTRY OF AN OPPOSITION POLITICIAN WHO PLANNED TO VISIT THE STATE TO PREPARE FOR THE COMING ELECTIONS. THE STATE GOVERNMENT CLAIMED THAT THE VISIT WAS PLANNED FOR REASONS OTHER THAN LEGITIMATE POLITICAL ACTIVITY, BUT THE OPPOSITION HAS LEVELLED CHARGES OF POLITICAL HARASSMENT. THE INCIDENT HAS RESURRECTED ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION AGAINST THE SABAH CHIEF MINISTER. END SUMMARY.

2. DEMOCRATIC ACTION PARTY (DAP) POLITICAL BUREAU DIRECTOR AND MP LEE LAM THYE WAS REFUSED PERMISSION TO ENTER THE STATE OF SABAH ON MAY 16 AFTER ARRIVING AT THE AIRPORT IN KOTA KINABALU. (FYI. UNDER THE ALAYSIAN CONSTITU-
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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 KUALA 04619 250041Z

TION SABAH AND SARAWAK RETAIN CONTROL OVER TRAVEL AND IMMIGRATION INTO THE STATE.) THE SABAH GOVERNMENT OFFERED NO IMMEDIATE EXPLANATION FOR THE BAN ON LEE'S ENTRY, BUT AN AIRPORT IMMIGRATION OFFICER WAS QUOTED IN THE PRESS AS SAYING THAT THE DIRECTIVE HAD COME FROM "HIGHER AUTHORITIES" IN THE STATE. ONLY ON MAY 19 AFTER A NUMBER OF PUBLIC COMPLAINTS BY THE DAP

DID THE SABAH STATE SECRETARY ISSUE A STATEMENT SAYING THAT LEE WAS NOT ALLOWED TO ENTER THE STATE BECAUSE "IT WAS NOT CONSIDERED THAT HIS VISIT WAS FOR A LEGITIMATE POLITICAL ACTIVITY," AND BECAUSE HIS PRESENCE IN THE STATE WOULD "POSE A SECURITY RISK". THE STATE SECRETARY WENT ON TO ARGUE THAT DURING A MARCH VISIT TO SABAH, DAP SECRETARY GENERAL LIM KIT SIANG HAD RAISED A NUMBER OF SENSITIVE ISSUES PUBLICALLY DESPITE A PROMISE NOT TO DO SO AND IMPLIED THAT LEE LAM THYE WOULD DO THE SAME.

3. THE DAP NATURALLY SEIZED ON LEE'S BAN FROM SABAH TO MAKE POLITICAL CAPITAL. IN A MAY 17 PRESS CONFERENCE LEE ACCUSED THE SABAH STATE GOVERNMENT OF ABUSING THE IMMIGRATION ACT, WHICH PROVIDES FOR VISITORS FROM PENINSULAR MALAYSIA WHO WILL ENGAGE IN LEGITIMATE POLITICAL ACTIVITY, AND OF MAKING A MOCKERY OF DEMOCRACY. HE ALSO SAID THE SABAH GOVERNMENT'S MOTIVES IN BANNING HIM ROSE FROM FEAR OF THE DAP'S GROWING POLITICAL POWER IN THE STATE. FINALLY, LEE DELIVERED THE UNKINDEST CUT OF ALL BY CHARACTERIZING THE GOVERNMENT OF CHIEF MINISTER HARRIS SALLEH AS NO BETTER THAN THE MUSTAPHA REGIME IT REPLACED AFTER PROMISING CLEAN, DEMOCRATIC AND JUST GOVERNMENT. ALSO ON MAY 17 LIM KIT SIANG TOLD REPORTERS THAT HARRIS HAD BANNED LEE BECAUSE HE WAS AFRAID THE DAP POLITICIAN MIGHT RAISE CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 KUALA 04619 250041Z

THE ALLEGATIONS OF HARRIS' CORRUPTION IN THE PURCHASE OF GRUMMAN AIRCRAFT (I.E., THE SEC CASE AGAINST PAGE AIRWAYS-SEE REFTEL).

4. THE PURPOSE OF LEE'S TRIP TO SABAH WAS TO ORGANIZE SEVERAL DAP BRANCHES IN SABAH WITH A VIEW TOWARD PUTTING UP CANDIDATES IN THE FORTHCOMING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS (STATE ELECTIONS ARE NOT DUE IN SABAH UNTIL 1981). LEE TOLD EMBOFFS SEVERAL DAYS BEFORE THE TRIP THAT HE EXPECTED NO DIFFICULTY IN ENTERING SABAH IN SPITE OF THE PROBLEMS LIM KIT SIANG HAD ENCOUNTERED IN MARCH.

5. COMMENT. HARRIS SALLEH WAS APPARENTLY SUFFICIENTLY EMBARRASSED BY LIM KIT SIANG'S VISIT IN MARCH TO WANT TO AVOID A POSSIBLE REPETITION BY BANNING ANOTHER DAP POLITICAN AND RISKING THE INVIDIOUS COMPARISON WITH FORMER CHIEF MINISTER TUN MUSTAPHA WHO REGULARLY BANNED POTENTIAL POLITICAL OPPONENTS. HOWEVER, LEE LAM THYE HAS A WELL-DESERVED REPUTATION AS THE MOST MODERATE OF THE DAP MP'S AND WAS PROBABLY CHOSEN FOR THIS REASON TO CARRY OUT FURTHER ORGANIZATION OF THE PARTY IN SABAH. THE DAP HAS THUS BEEN GIVEN ANOTHER

OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW ITSELF AS THE VICTIM OF NATIONAL
FRONT POLITICAL HEAVY-HANDEDNESS. IT MAY ALSO BE TRUE THAT
HARRIS WAS CONCERNED THAT THE PAGE CASE WOULD BE RAISED
AGAIN BY LEE (WHO, INCIDENTALLY DID NOT EVEN MENTION
THE CASE WHEN HE MET WITH EMBOFFS BEFORE HIS ABORTED
SABAH TRIP), BUT IT IS EQUALLY LIKELY THAT THE DAP WOULD
NOT HAVE BROUGHT UP THE CASE HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THIS
INCIDENT. IN ANY EVENT THE BANNING OF LEE LAM
THYER PROMPTED THE FIRST PUBLIC MENTION OF THE CASE SINCE
JUST AFTER IT FIRST BROKE IN MID-APRIL.
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